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LEADERS MEET ON EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN RIFT

ANNCR:

THE PREMIERS OF EGYPT, SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET NEXT WEEK IN RIAD TO DISCUSS SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN DIFFERENCES. AND AS VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS REPORTS FROM OUR MIDDLE EAST BUREAU, THE TALKS MAY LEAD TO A SUMMIT MEETING.

VOICE:

THE SEMI-OFFICIAL SAUDI NEWS AGENCY SAYS FLATLY THERE WILL BE A MEETING AND IT WILL BE HELD NEXT MONTH IN RIAD. ACCORDING TO THE NEWS AGENCY, KING KHALID AND KUWAITI RULER SHEIK SABAH AL-SALIM AL-SABAH WILL TRY TO SETTLE THE DISPUTE BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA DURING TALKS WITH PRESIDENTS SADAT AND AL-ASSAD.

THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN RIFT SURFACED LAST SEPTEMBER WHEN CAIRO SIGNED THE SINAI DISENGAGEMENT PACT WITH ISRAEL, AN AGREEMENT WORKED OUT WITH THE HELP OF U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER. EARLIER THIS WEEK, SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABDEL HALIM KHADDAM REAFFIRMED HIS GOVERNMENT'S OPOSITION TO THE SINAI ACCORD, WARNING OF WHAT HE CALLED ITS NEGATIVE AFFECT ON ARAB SOLIDARITY AND THE PALESTINE ISSUE. MISTER KHADDAM MADE THE STATEMENT AFTER MEETING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA WHO LATER WENT ON TO CAIRO FOR TALKS WITH EGYPTIAN LEADERS. THOSE DISCUSSIONS LED TO AGREEMENT ON NEXT WEEK'S RIAD MEETING OF THE FOUR PREMIERS.

THE CAIRO NEWSPAPER AL AKHBAR WELCOMED THE SCHEDULED RIAD CONFERENCE AND THE POSSIBLE SUMMIT TALKS SAYING THESE NEW CONTACTS COULD MARK THE BEGINNING OF A FRANK AND POSITIVE DIALOGUE AIMED AT IMPROVED INTER-ARAB TIES. ANOTHER CAIRO DAILY, AL AHRAM, PRAISED THE MEDIATION EFFORTS OF SAUDI ARABIA

AND KUWAIT SAYING EGYPT IS ALWAYS READY TO TAKE PART IN EFFORTS TO UNIFY ARAB ACTIONS.

OBSERVERS DESCRIBE THE DISPUTE BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND CAIRO AS AN EXTREMELY COMPLEX ISSUE INVOLVING A NUMBER OF OTHER ARAB STATES AND THE PALESTINE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT. SYRIA'S CONDEMNATION OF THE SINAI ACCORD WAS QUICKLY SECONDED BY THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION. AND CAIRO'S RELATIONS WITH THE P-L-O WERE SEVERELY STRAINED. BUT EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT HAS CONTINUED TO SUPPORT THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, AND REMARKS IN HIS MAY DAY SPEECH IN DEFENSE OF PALESTINIAN NATIONAL RIGHTS BROUGHT FAVORABLE REACTION FROM THE PALESTINE NEWS AGENCY. INFORMED SOURCES SAY IT IS CLEAR THAT SOME GROUPS WITHIN THE P-L-O WANT IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH CAIRO BUT SYRIAN-BACKED PALESTINIAN FACTIONS REMAIN STRONGLY CRITICAL OF EGYPTIAN POLICY.

OBSERVERS ARE WONDERING ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF A POSSIBLE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA ON THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. SYRIA HAS PLAYED THE MAJOR ROLE IN EFFORTS TO END THE BLOODY FIGHTING. SOME SYRIAN TROOPS ARE IN POSITION JUST INSIDE LEBANESE TERRITORY AND DAMASCUS IS BACKING A LARGE PALESTINIAN PEACEKEEPING FORCE. BUT OTHER PALESTINIAN FACTIONS ARE CLOSELY TIED WITH LEBANON'S LEFT-WING ALLIANCE WHICH HAS CONDEMNED SYRIAN INTERVENTION. IT IS THESE SAME PALESTINIAN FACTIONS THAT ARE REPORTEDLY MOVING TOWARD CLOSER TIES WITH EGYPT. HOWEVER, A LEADING LEBANESE NEWSPAPER SAYS ALL PALESTINIAN GROUPS REMAIN OPPOSED TO THE SINAI AGREEMENT AND WILL NOT SEEK IMPROVED TIES WITH EGYPT AT THE EXPENSE OF RELATIONS WITH SYRIA.

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